

Spring 2014

A Shopper's Tale: A Visual Narrative

Alexandra Kolker
akolker@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Kolker, Alexandra, "A Shopper's Tale: A Visual Narrative" (2014). *Honors Projects*. 133.
<https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/133>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

A Shopper's Tale: A Visual Narrative

Alexandra Kolker

HONORS PROJECT

Submitted to the Honors College
at Bowling Green State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with

UNIVERSITY HONORS

5 May, 2014

Jenn Stucker, Graphic Design, Advisor

Gordon Ricketts, Arts Village, Advisor

Alexandra Kolker

HNRS 4990

Honors Project

5 May, 2014

“A Shopper’s Tale: A Visual Narrative”

“A Shopper’s Tale” is a creative project that is the result of research concerning visual narrative through a creative writing and graphic design perspective. These perspectives necessitated an integration of ideas from both fields of study, and therefore the project objective is to explore unexpected ways to reveal narrative in everyday, designed, objects. “A Shopper’s Tale,” by its name, suggests a relationship between a shopper and a story; it uses artifacts associated with consumerism including receipts, bank statements, and coupons to reveal the narrative within. This non-traditional approach to storytelling aims to answer the research question that began the project: how can non-traditional presentations of narrative play with one’s expectations and engage people to see their world differently?

Research of narrative and visual storytelling revealed that, while visual narratives and experimentation of visual narratives are nothing new, “A Shopper’s Tale” can add to this experimentation through its exploration of the way narrative can be broken down and presented in non-traditional, or unexpected, formats. These formats were chosen as a result of the abundance of receipts and other paper artifacts that people interact with on a day to day basis. These artifacts are traces of where people have been and what they have chosen to surround themselves with. The components of “A Shopper’s Tale” are inspired by the idea of objects that act as traces people leave behind.

Examining items that people leave behind became a big influence in the creation of the project, and one particular source, *Motel of the Mysteries* by David Macaulay, addresses objects that are left behind in a humorous fashion. *Motel of the Mysteries* takes everyday objects that can

be found in motel rooms and assigns new meaning to these objects, some of which are television remotes and toilet seats, among other items. It treats these items in this motel as if the location were an ancient burial site. This book reveals the way meaning is challenged when the context of objects is changed. It creates situations that cause readers to question what they think they know about the objects that exist around them during their everyday lives. Like in *Motel of the Mysteries*, “A Shopper’s Tale” addresses the meanings of the paper products that make it up in a way that is unexpected to the reader in order to make everyday objects more engaging and cause readers to explore unexpected visualizations of narrative.

Other than the use of artifacts as a starting point in this project, Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* explores the uses of alternative media to express a story. The majority of the book is written in prose as an everyday novel, however one chapter in this book uses powerpoint slides as a way to express a story. Graphs and diagrams are put on the pages and each element of these graphs and diagrams contains a part of the chapter. This layout of the story causes readers to stop and explore the format more closely. These snippets of a story, as written by Jennifer Egan, inspired the segmentation of the story in “A Shopper’s Tale.” Within “A Shopper’s Tale,” the breakdown of the story by scene in each receipt is reflective of this organization.

In order to explore unexpected visualizations of narrative, this project studies three kinds of artifacts that reflect the subject of the narrative. These artifacts include receipts, bank statements, and coupons that have been created for the characters of the story. The receipts tell the largest portion of the story, bank statements suggest conversations outside of receipt scenes, and coupons serve as additional information not found in the other artifacts.

Making the receipts for “A Shopper’s Tale” consisted of creating a narrative and breaking it down by scene. Each receipt represents a scene within the story, and each line of dialogue acts as if it is an item on the receipt. These sections of dialogue are read aloud and timed. The times for each character’s line is used in place of dollar amounts, and these add up at the end, serving as a pacing device in the absence of a sizable amount of text outside of the dialogue. Additional narration is included at the end of selected receipts that pokes fun at the characters, sets the scene, or provides additional insight.

The story continues through invented bank statements. These include narrative in a more traditional sense, using a typical paragraph structure in sections to describe scene. In other sections of the statements, the dialogue between characters is written in poem. Poem sections take the place of listed transactions in the statements, similar to the structure of the receipts. The lines of the poem sections are also measured for the time it takes to read the lines, and the times are written as dollar amounts beside the lines.

Lastly, “A Shopper’s Tale” includes coupons that provide supplementary information to the story. The coupons reveal the story from the perspective of fictional stores that the characters visit, and act as observers that comment on the behavior of the characters, tempting them with options that are represented by coupon codes. These coupon codes relate to the receipts. Some of the codes match those found on select receipts, and therefore the coupon text expands on the story.

The resulting project is a set of receipts, bank statements, and coupons whose intent is to be displayed as a set in a gallery setting. The personal artifacts that have been invented invite public attention into a personal space and highlight the subtlety of the narrative within. The receipts were set up in the School of Art’s BFA Exhibition in the spring of 2014, during which

time it was on display for viewers to interact with the project. While a number of gallery visitors passed the project by, those that stopped to study the work found that there was something unexpected and remained to read a sampling of the story. In one instance, a viewer took photos of the project, suggesting that an extension of the project might be to create some method of distribution for readers to get a whole sense of immersion into the artifacts.

Conclusions from the research and method of creating “A Shopper’s Tale” as a study of visual narrative are that experimental narratives are not uncommon, but there are still many ways that these narratives can be pushed further and interwoven into the world today. These narratives cause people to see things differently, and this project aims to cause the same reaction in people who take the time to explore its content. “A Shopper’s Tale” builds on experimental storytelling and blended media that exists in the literature and design fields today to create a new experience through of everyday objects.

Bibliography

Bingaman-Burt, Kate. *The Office of Kate Bingaman-Burt*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2013.

Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt, 1981. Print.

Carey, Mike, and Peter Gross. *The Unwritten: Tommy Taylor and the Bogus Identity*. Vol. 1. New York: DC Comics, 2010. Print.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. New York: Anchor Books, 2010. Print.

Frost, Randy O., and Gail Steketee. *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. Print.

Green, Hank, and Bernie Su. "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries." *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2013.

Keats, Patrice A. "Multiple Text Analysis In Narrative Research: Visual, Written, And Spoken Stories Of Experience." *Qualitative Research* 9.2 (2009): 181-195. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 30 Nov. 2013.

Stern, Jerome. *Making Shapely Fiction*. New York: Norton, 1991. Print.

Tomasula, Steve, and Stephen Farrell. *TOC: A New-Media Novel*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2009. DVD.

Tomasula, Steve and Stephen Farrell. *Vas: an Opera in Flatland*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.

Macaulay, David. *Motel of the Mysteries*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979. Print.

Millar, Mark, and Steve McNiven. *Civil War: Script Book*. New York: Marvel, 2007. Print.

McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics*. New York: Paradox, 2000. Print.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Print.

Nix, Garth. *Across the Wall: A Tale of the Abhorsen and Other Stories*. New York, NY:

HarperCollins, 2005. Print.





